



FEMA

The Unconquered Seminoles: Protecting People and Property

Hollywood, FL - In a state rocked by one powerful hurricane season after another, the leadership of the Seminole Tribe of Florida has taken numerous steps to protect its members. Curt Sommerhoff, emergency manager for the tribe, said the efforts have created a security for reservation residents that equals or exceeds measures taken by many cities or counties throughout Florida.

In September 2002, the Seminole Tribe adopted the Florida Building Code as the model for its own construction standards.

The building techniques implemented by the Seminoles are considered "code plus," or above code. They are most prominently featured in the Fort Pierce reservation community, is comprised of 35 homes, with plans for another 35. Each house has been built to withstand 140 mph winds using concrete and steel construction. Then, each home was fitted with impact-resistant windows and shutters. Finally, a 15,000-watt generator with enough power to run the entire house was installed.

The Seminoles' mitigation efforts far exceed strong building techniques and several critical services are available to tribe members at no cost. For example, the tribe has secured a number of large fuel tanks with separate containers for diesel and gasoline. The tanks are constantly maintained, keeping fuel for emergency needs accessible—even in times of shortage.

Working closely with the South Florida Water Management District, the Seminoles keep a close eye on Lake Okeechobee and other nearby bodies of water for signs of possible flooding.

The tribe has its own aviation department consisting of several planes and helicopters. The aircraft are used not only to facilitate disaster response throughout the six reservations and to help those Seminoles who live off the reservations in Florida, but also to assist neighboring communities. The Seminoles are actively involved in assisting Native American tribes in other parts of the country, and will send their aircraft to support and deliver supplies and equipment in times of need.

The Seminole Tribe has its own television station and satellite TV reception is provided to all tribal members. Prior to a hurricane or other disaster, the station broadcasts advisories and updates. The broadcasting department has produced a hurricane-preparedness TV program that will air regularly during hurricane season.

Currently, the tribe is working toward completing a number of programs that will help maintain its high level of preparedness. By 2007, the tribe will be compliant with the National Incident Management System, which is a uniform structure that allows all responders to follow the same procedures and ultimately improves communication and overall effectiveness in disaster response. In addition, the Seminoles are establishing Community Emergency Response Teams for each of their reservations, and plan to participate in the National Weather Service's StormReady program by the end of 2006.



Tribal,
FEMA Region IV



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Building Codes

Primary Funding:

Private funds